

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A support apparatus for a steering column, comprising: an upper bracket through which a lower housing of the steering column is installed to a vehicle body; a lower bracket through which the lower housing is installed to the vehicle body, the lower bracket being spaced from the upper bracket; a first releasing mechanism provided to the upper bracket to allow the lower housing to slide forward at collision of a vehicle having the steering column; and a second releasing mechanism provided between the lower bracket and the lower housing to allow the lower housing to slide forward relative to and release from the lower bracket at the collision of the vehicle, the second releasing mechanism including means defining a through-hole in the lower bracket, the front end section of the lower housing being projectable forward through the through-hole, an engaging and releasing device through which the lower housing is engageable with the lower bracket and releasable from the lower bracket when a forward load is applied to the steering column, and a guide member disposed forward of the through-hole to slidably guide the bottom surface of the lower housing forward generally along an axial direction of the steering column at a normal state when the front end section of the lower housing gets out of the through-hole.

2. (Currently Amended) A support apparatus for a steering column as claimed in claim 1, comprising:

an upper bracket through which a lower housing of the steering column is installed to a vehicle body;

a lower bracket through which the lower housing is installed to the vehicle body, the lower bracket being spaced from the upper bracket;

a first releasing mechanism provided to the upper bracket to allow the lower housing to slide forward at collision of a vehicle having the steering column; and

a second releasing mechanism provided between the lower bracket and the lower housing to allow the lower housing to slide forward relative to and release from the lower bracket at the collision of the vehicle, the second releasing mechanism including means defining a through-hole in the lower bracket, the front end section of the lower housing being

projectable forward through the through-hole in the lower bracket, an engaging and releasing device through which the lower housing is engageable with the lower bracket and releasable from the lower bracket when a forward load is applied to the steering column , and a guide member disposed forward of the through-hole to slidingly guide the bottom surface of the lower housing forward generally along an axial direction of the steering column at a normal state when the front end section of the lower housing gets out of the through hole,

wherein the through-hole has a lateral dimension larger than a vertical dimension of the through-hole, and the engaging and releasing device includes a first engaging section disposed at the front end section of the lower housing and having a lateral dimension which is not larger than the vertical dimension of the through-hole, and a second engaging section disposed on the side of the lower bracket and engageable with the first engaging section, so that the first engaging section on the side of the lower housing is engaged with the second engaging section on the side of the lower bracket by inserting the first engaging section into the through-opening upon turning the first engaging section to one of right and left directions around an axis passing through the through-hole so as to incline the first engaging section relative to a regular posture of the first engaging section, and pulling the first engaging section rearward upon returning the first engaging section into the regular posture after the first engaging section passes through the through-hole.

3. (Original) A support apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the guide member is formed of a material which is lower in frictional resistance than metal.

4. (Original) A support apparatus as claimed in claim 2, wherein the first engaging section includes first and second straight extending engaging portions which extend generally along the axis of the steering column, and the second engaging section includes third and fourth straight extending engaging portions which extend generally along the axis of the steering column and engageable respectively with the first and second straight extending engaging portions.

5. (Original) A method of supporting a steering column to a vehicle body by a support apparatus, the support apparatus including an upper bracket through which a lower housing of the steering column is installed to the vehicle body; a lower bracket through which the lower

housing is installed to the vehicle body, the lower bracket being spaced from the upper bracket; a first releasing mechanism provided to the upper bracket to allow the lower housing to slide forward at collision of a vehicle having the steering column; and a second releasing mechanism provided between the lower bracket and the lower housing to allow the lower housing to slide forward relative to and release from the lower bracket at the collision of the vehicle, the second releasing mechanism including means defining a through-hole in the lower bracket, the front end section of the lower housing being projectable forward through the through-hole, an engaging and releasing device through which the lower housing is engageable with the lower bracket and releasable from the lower bracket when a forward load is applied to the steering column, and a guide member disposed forward of the through-hole to slidably guide the bottom surface of the lower housing forward generally along an axial direction of the steering column at a normal state when the lower housing gets out of the through-hole, the through-hole having a lateral dimension larger than a vertical dimension of the through-hole, wherein the engaging and releasing device includes a first engaging section disposed at the front end section of the lower housing and having a lateral dimension which is not larger than the vertical dimension of the through-hole, and a second engaging section disposed at on the side of the lower bracket and engageable with the first engaging section, the supporting method including an operation of engaging the first engaging section on the side of the lower housing with the second engaging section on the side of the lower bracket, the engaging operation comprising the following steps in the order set forth: turning the first engaging section to one of right and left directions around an axis passing through the through-hole so as to incline the first engaging section relative to a regular posture of the first engaging section; inserting the turned first engaging section into the through-opening; returning the first engaging section into the regular posture after the first engaging section passes through the through-hole; and pulling the first engaging section rearward so as to engage the first engaging section with the second engaging section.

6. (New) A support apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the lower bracket is disposed forward of the upper bracket.

7. (New) A support apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the guide member slidably guides substantially only the bottom surface of the lower housing.